Journal of Literature and Art Studies, July 2018, Vol. 8, No. 7, 1071-1078
doi: 10.17265/2159-5836/2018.07.012

Support from Examiner's Non-verbal Behavior in Spoken Test*

HE Chenghui

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College, Guangzhou, China

Based on the overall view of communication theory and spoken English language testing system, this paper has conducted a comprehensive and specific observation and research on how examiner non-verbal behavior has affected candidate performance. The research has found out that not only examiner behavior including non-verbal behavior but language testing scenario itself is of communicative nature and examiner's non-verbal behavior indeed promotes examinee's test performance, which can help to better understand spoken testing system, examiner non-verbal behavior, and testing environment to promote the development of language speaking test and reflect examinee's real language competence and ability.

Keywords: English spoken test, examiner, non-verbal behavior, communicative nature

Introduction

Most of the recent researches on language testing system are focused on the inside factor of testing system such as the language testing theory, reliability and validity of testing assessment. Very few researches are concerned about the communication factors of the test, not to mention the effects of non-verbal communication and non-verbal behaviors existing all along the language testing process. As a matter of fact, non-verbal communication, in the real life, conducts 65% of the message and information exchange work (Ross, 1974) in our face-to-face communication. As an important part both in participation and evaluation of the oral testing system, examiner's non-verbal behavior would be one of the neglected factors, which, intentionally or unintentionally, have an influence, more or less, on examinee's speaking proficiency.

Although speaking tests are claimed to be trying to imitate a realenvironment for language communication, they, actually, have already been more a kind of human communication than merely a test, therefore, non-verbal communication phenomenon should not be ignored in face-to-face languageinterview tests. This research is trying to make an attempt to investigate how non-verbal communication, especially the non-verbal behaviors of examiner, as a uniqueness in face-to-face interviews that human-to-machine tests cannot possess, affects

* **Acknowledgements**: This paper is funded by the Key Program of the English Language and Literature of Guangdong Province, 2016; and is part of *A Study on Information-Sharing-Based Autonomy and Strategy in University Students' English Learning*, a project granted as Foreign Language Information Special Project 2017 in the 13th Five-Year Plan for Guangdong Province Philosophy and Social Sciences (Grant No. GD17WXZ14); a part of *A Practical Research of the PAD of Pattern in the College Extended Courses*, a Guangdong Provincial Quality Project—Teaching Research & Reform Project of Higher Education in Guangdong, 2017 (Grant No. GDJG201701); a part of auniversity-sponsored research project: *A Feasibility Study on Independent College-Based Assessment of Student English Proficiency* for Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College (Grant No. 18-015B).

HE Chenghui, MA in Applied Linguistics, Department of College English Teaching, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College, Guangzhou, China.

examinee's performance in light of the special communication environment of testing.

For better analysis of examiners' non-verbal behaviors from the view of communication, it is necessary to review several aspects of communication and speaking testing system, and some relative research on speaking tests and non-verbal communication and non-verbal behaviors.

Non-verbal Behavior in Communication & Spoken Testing

Definition of Non-verbal Behavior

Communication is generally defined as having both a verbal and non-verbal component. Whereas verbal communication often refers to the words we use in communication, non-verbal communication refers to communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues (Knapp & Hall, 1997).

Malandro and Barker (1989) describes non-verbal communication as "the process by which non-verbal behaviors are use, either singly or in combination with verbal behaviors, in the exchange and interpretation of messages with a given situation or context". Samovar (1998) regards non-verbal communication as it "involves all those non-verbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver". Without the help of non-verbal behavior, language itself cannot successfully accomplish the information delivering and interpreting work. In many communicative situations, non-verbal communication is much more effective than verbal communication as it largely depends on acoustic effects, whereas non-verbal communication consists of visual, tactile, and other sensation images.

Classification of Non-verbal Behavior

Sabatelli and Rubin (1986) examined the role of non-verbal expressiveness as a mediator of initial interpersonal impressions. The results suggest that non-verbal expressiveness plays an important role as a mediator of initial impressions and, consequently, may influence to a significant degree the course of subsequent interpersonal exchanges.

Highlen and Hill have identified areas of study in non-verbal behavior as paralinguistics, kinesics, facial expression, visual behavior, proxemics, and touch. "Paralinguistics deals with vocal cues, such as pitch, tone, intonation, and modulation, that accompany speech. These also include sounds from throat, such as humming or filling silence with sounds like 'ummmm' or 'aaaa'" (Highlen & Hill, 1984, cited from Yammiyavar, Clemmensen, & Kumar, 2008).

A Chinese scholar Bi Jiwan (1998) puts forward the following classifications of non-verbal communication: (1) body language, including basic posture, gesture, basic manners and movements of any part of the body; (2) paralanguage, referring to these elements such as pitch, speed, volume, tone, rhythm, silence, and pause; (3) object language, consisting of smell, complexion, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, etc.; and (4) environmental language, including time, space, colors, city planning, and any human effect on nature. And he further pointed out that the former two could be considered as "Non-verbal Behavior", and the latter two "Non-verbal means".

Effectivenessof Non-verbalBehavior in Communication

Whether realizing or not, non-verbal communication has always made a great contribution to the

accomplishment of communication. This is because verbal communication mostly language conveys the idea of the thoughts, while non-verbal communication indicates the way of communication, the relationship of both parties of the communication, such as their attitudes, emotions, characteristics, cultural features, and social status.

The information delivered by non-verbal communication is far more effective than verbal communication. In Ross's research (1974) on non-verbal communication effects, he finds that only 35% of the information is delivered by language, whereas 65% by non-verbal behavior, mostly by body movements. In classroom teaching research, 82% of teaching effects are achieved by teacher's non-verbal behavior such as facial expression, body actions, only 18% by verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is more believable than verbal communication when the two are incongruent (Malandro & Barker, 1989).

Non-verbal Communication in Spoken Language Testing

Testing the ability to speak is a most important aspect of language testing under the prevalence of communicative language competence in language teaching and testing. Hughes (1989) lists three general formats of oral tests: interview, interaction with peers, and response to tape-recordings. Interview is the most obvious format but one drawback is also mentioned that the relationship between the tester and candidate is usually such that the candidate speaks as to a superior and is unwilling to take the initiative. In interaction with peer test, the performance of one candidate is likely to be affected by that of the others. Response to tape-recordings tests can achieve uniformity of elicitation procedures, but there is no way following up candidate's responses.

A Chinese scholar Wen (1999) also divided, most of the communicative spoken proficiency tests can be categorized into three: face-to face direct interview, semi-direct interview and indirect speaking tests, or laboratory-based oral testing. However, the indirect tests, regardless of its less cost of personnel, money, and time, have always been criticized on the absence of a real communication in its human-to-machine speaking process. Ranging from direct to indirect, Liu and Han (1999) believe that speaking tests evaluate test-takers' speaking proficiency through their performance in the language task designed in an oral test. The most frequent-used way is direct oral test, mostly interview, conversation, or discussion, in which examiners ask some prepared, sometimes further, questions to test-takers.

In any test involving oral interaction, performance is co-constructed among the participants, including both examiners and examinees. When interlocutors interact in a communicative context, "through semiotically mediated 'negotiation', [they] create a temporarily shared social world" (Wertsch, 1985, cited from Brooks, 2009). When the interaction is between a tester and test-taker, studies have shown that the behavior of the tester can and does have an effect on test-taker performance (Brooks, 2009).

Non-verbal language has drawn much more attention than ever before, having already achieved a considerable degree of recognition as an important source of interpersonal communication in tests. Eye contact, body posture, and facial expression have been cited as important variance producing variable in the area of human relations (Saigh, 1980). In his experiment of WISC-R test, actually not even a language test, he examined the effects of non-verbal comments on the student performance. Students achieved higher WISC-R scaled scores with positive non-verbal treatment from an examiner who consistently leaned forward, establishing eye contact while simultaneously smiling and nodding after each examinee response than those with bland expression, sitting back, and consistently looking down behavior from the same psychologist. The incidence of examinee

overelaboration was recorded as an index of anxiety and significant difference was observed in the direction of the non-verbal praise procedure.

Lazaraton (1996) presents that the results are heartening if the participants in oral interviews engage in "conversation-like" behaviors and if "conversation" in a speech event that the oral interview attempt to approximate. Also, in order to ensure a fair and true interaction environment, testers are advised not to slow speech, echo or correct response, furnish vocabulary or complete utterance, rush response time (Buck, 1989, cited from Lazaraton, 1996).

Findings in Plough's (2008) research that to what extent the discourse behaviors of examiner salient to participants of an oral performance test reveal the meaningfulness of examiner non-verbal behavior from the perspective of the candidate and indicate that the verbal, paralinguistic, and non-verbal behaviors of examiners are indeed significant to participants in the testing event. All the comments from the candidates about the examiners' body position and eye contact reveal the meaningfulness of examiner non-verbal behavior from the perspective of the candidate in that context. Examiners must be made equally aware of the influence of their non-verbal behavior on the testing event and ultimately the possible effect on candidate performance. It demonstrates a need for investigation into the effects of examiner non-verbal in oral performance testing. The awareness of non-verbal behaviors from candidates is salient as crucial variables in the co-construction of the testing context.

Research on Examiners' Non-verbal Behavior Effects on Examinees

Based on the communication theory, non-verbal behaviors perform greatly on both communicating parties. Oral examination can be seen as a special communication environment which is designed to test candidate real language proficiency. In this created language communication environment of power relations, examiner behavior is playing leading role as instructor, interlocutor, and evaluator. According to the literature review, examiner behaviors and their influence on examinee have not yet got sufficient attention in the researching field, only because it is one of the very macro factors in the testing system and it is really difficult to find scientific and specific methods to study non-verbal behavior.

Research Design on Examiners' Non-verbal Behavior Observation

In fact, examiner non-verbal expressions like gesture, gaze, proxemics, and facial expression, etc., convey certain degree of examiner attitude which will have the potential to influence the language testing process. And other para-linguistic factors such as the volume, strength and speed of the voice, and breath, smile, vocal segregates and even silence during the communication will be observed and analyzed in the research. The research on examiner non-verbal behavior is based on the collected materials and data from two language speaking testing system, IELTS (International English Language Test System) Oral, a mature, wide-spread, well-known language testing system of reputation and recognition, and TEP (Oral), Test for English Proficiency, a brand-new, small-ranged oral language testing system which is still in its testing and developing process by joint work of Beijing International Studies University and other fellow member universities of the TEP (Oral) team. The research is trying to find out whether examiner non-verbal behavior makes influence on examinee testing performance and proficiency, how it influences and how much it influences, as well as other para-linguistic factors such as the volume, strength and speed of the voice, and breath, smile, vocal segregates,

and even silence during the communication.

To reach a convincible and credible result, various research methods including both qualitative and quantitative synthetical analysis will be conducted on the data collected from the two speaking testing systems so as to make an overall and objective research on effects of examiner non-verbal behavior on examinee, including testing video behavior and transcript analysis, questionnaire to examinees and interviews to examiners and examinees. The research design hopes to collect reflections from both sides of speaking testing, examiner and examinee, to find out what and how the effects of examiner non-verbal behavior during the testing process.

Research Findings

Common examiners' non-verbal behavior in spoken examinations. The result shows that as a more powerful part in the examination, examiner actions, including gesture, gaze, facial expression, posture, and proxemics, not only help examiner to clarify the examination instruction, but also contribute to establishing a convincible and harmonious environment of communication to inspire the language proficiency performance of test-takers.

(a) Gaze: examiner's eye movements during examiner-leading parts in the test, when the examiner gives test instructions or initiates verbal communication to the examinee. And in the five of seven testing videos, the examiners spent more time reading their instructions paper than looking at the examinees while they are speaking.

(b) Facial expression: as a notification in examiner training book of TEP (Oral) that the examiner should keep a relaxed facial expression so as not to put any pressure to make the test-taker nervous, and smile would be the most effective way to help build an easy and relax language environment for the testing. The communicative intentions, to some certain extent, can help examinee focus on the idea and information exchange rather than just finishing a speaking task in the examination. The most common facial expression is smile.

(c) Gesture: head movement and hand movement as two behaviors focused on the research. Head nodding generally can be observed in two types according the happening time in the process communication. The first head movements also happen during the speaking, functioning as stress, emphasis, or affirmative signals from the speaker, which intend to draw on listener's attention to the one certain specific ideas of the speaking. The second category is response to the speaker. It happens to the listeners when they are focusing on the ideas they are interested in or as muscle nerve response that he/she is listening, message received.

Figure 1. Hand movements.

Figure 1 has shown the two most common (the two on the left) and one less common hand movements. The picture in the middle shows that the examiner is using a very respectful way to stress and clarify his instruction. In some ambiguous language situation, they help examinee to follow exactly what the instructions tell them to do.

According to the hand movement interpretation from Morris (1994), when one put his thumb and index finger around the chin, he is thinking about the ideas expressed by the talker, which probably means the talker is sending a thoughtful idea or the talker does not make him understood.

(d) Paralanguage: as the paralinguistic features or language that can be divided, according to Knapp (1978, cited from Bi, 1998), into two parts, voice qualities and vocalizations. Voice quality includes the loudness, speed, intonation control, and other quality of the voice. Vocalizations is the vocal characteristics of the voice including the sound of laughter, weep, giggle, breath, strength, and other features even vocal segregates like "uh-huh", "um", "uh", "ah", and silence, and turn talking. The change of speaking pace of the examiner and interruption and repetition behavior examiner's speaking are the common paralinguistic features.

Two supportive cases in research results: Examiner non-verbal behavior communicative influence on examinee.

Case 1—Examiner's pace of speechchanges according to the examinee's language proficiency

As shown in Figure 2, she examiner pace of speech in Sample 3 is much faster than Sample 1 and 2 in the IELTS speaking. And also, the same examiner speaks fewer words than the other two within a same speaking test standard. The answer, surprisingly, comes from the examinee. The examinee's language level and proficiency are influencing the examiner performance in such standard speaking test. When they have a lot to say about examiner's question in the test, they would probably have included the answers to other question, causing the examiner to do some simultaneous change about their test content to keep the smooth communication in the test. And when the examinee speaks more fluently in a faster speed, they would definitely raise the examiner's speaking speed, and vice versa.

	Examiner			Examinee/s	
IELTS	**Time**	**Content**	**Speech Rate**	**Speech Rate**	**Level/Grade**
Sample 1	3'06"	529 words	170 words/minute	91 words/minute	5
Sample 2	3'15"	540 words	166 words/minute	95 words/minute	5.5
Sample 3	2'25"	466 words	192 words/minute	136 words/minute	7

Figure 2. Description of some examiner & examinee paralinguistic features.

Case 2—Examiner's head-nodding response and eye contacts support examinee language fluency

Through a behavior and text transcript analysis of a video sample, the research finds out that there is some interrelationship between the non-verbal communication and the examinee's spoken performance including pace of speaking, and occurrence of disfluency. As demonstrated in Figure 3, inthe first 37-second summary, the examinee looked at two examiners to search for eye contact but received few responses from the examiner.

From the first sentence of second 51-second summary and comments, the examiner began her contact and nod responses to the examinee, and later the non-verbal communication became more frequent until the end of examinee's summary and comments.

	Speaking Time	**Speaking Content**	**Speech Rate**	**Disfluency**
Without Examiner Response	37 seconds	80	130 words /second	6
With Examiner Response	51 seconds	137	164 words /second	4

Figure 3. Examinee speaking performance with and without examiner response.

There are obvious differences between the two parts of the examinee's spoken performance with the different non-verbal responses from the examiner. For the first 37-second summary, the examinee actively searched for two examiners eye contact, but got very few responses. In the second part, the examinee had made very frequent and natural eye contact communication with Examiner B. When receiving some active responses as eye contact and nodding from the examiner, the examinee gradually raised his speech pace, and smoothly shared his ideas according to the task requirements. This has testified the positive influence of examiner eye contact and head nodding responses on examinee performance.

Communicative Nature of ExaminerNon-verbal Behavior

The research on exploration of examiner non-verbal behavior, based on the detailed video observation and data analysis and comprehensive interpretation of reflections from examinee's angle of view, has found that like an essential part of daily communication, examiner non-verbal behavior has presented its great communicative nature and these communicative non-verbal behaviors like relaxed facial expression, smiles, eye contact, hand and head movement, and some paralinguistic features can offer great positive support to examinee performance in language speaking test.

Facial expression is gaining the most attention during a test, followed by eye contact, loudness and speed of voice, examiner sitting gest, hand movement, time keeping (only with TEP Oral) head movement, reading, clothing and writing behavior, and other non-verbal behaviors. In fact, according the analysis in previous part and feedbacks from examinee, this inside silent influence has posed on examinee by examiner who is mostly positive in a relaxed and friendly testing environment. And in more general view of examinee reflection on examiner non-verbal behavior in language test, 70% of examinees reflect that they have noticed the examiner non-verbal behavior but in an unconscious way and more than 50% believe that examiner non-verbal behavior can have positive impacts on their test performance.

Discussion on Communicative Nature of Language Spoken Test

Firstly, under the background of communicative language theory prevalent to language teach and learning practice since two scores of years ago, isolated language knowledge in testing, including speaking test, has been replaced by communicative language proficiency. Language speaking testing in last decades has been trying to measure examinee communicative language proficiency by offering an imitated language environment and language tasks for test-takers and evaluating their comprehensive language ability presented in certain communication with supposed partner performed by examiner. Examiner interaction with examinee can be regarded as an actual human communication in which communicative effects are co-constructed by both verbal and non-verbal behavior from both sides of communication.

Secondly, examiner non-verbal behavior as an acceptable means of human communication, generally speaking, can generate positive effects on examinee language performance. Due to its nature of communication, examiner non-verbal behavior, as an unseparated part of communication, can help to establish a friendly and real relationship of communication between examiner and examinee. When we say examiner non-verbal behavior offer great support to examinee performance, it does not mean examiner non-verbal behavior would provide related answer for the examinee; it would only be a message through those behaviors to examinees that this is real communication for language use rather than only an examination, which encourages examinee to present their

real language proficiency their usually do in their daily life, which is the exact purpose of language testing for reflecting and evaluating language speaker's real language ability and proficiency. As Plough (2008) pointed out in her paper that

> Examiners must be made equally aware of the influence of their non-verbal behavior on the testing event and ultimately the possible effect on candidate performance. Training programs for examiners must include a component that raises examiner attentiveness to and appreciation for sociocultural aspects of oral performance tests. (pp. 195-217)

Conclusion

Examiner has play a dual role in language testing, communicator, and evaluator. Examiner controls and dominates the process of speaking test. In this extremely imbalanced power relationship of communication, it is quite common for examinee, the weaker part to fall into psychologic emotions or negatively influenced by non-language factor from outside environment, causing the ill-performance in communication. Therefore, the examiner should pay more attention to establish and create a relaxed and examinee-friendly communicative environment to help them demonstrate their real language proficiency and performance with not only their verbal words but also their non-verbal behaviors.

References

Bi, J. (1993). The effect of research on non-verbal intercultural communication on foreign language teaching. *Chinese Language Learning, 3*, 37-43.

Bi, J. (1998). *Non-verbal behavior in intercultural communication*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Brooks, L. (2009). Interacting in Pairs in a test of oral proficiency: Co-constructing a better performance. *Language Testing, 26*(3), 341-366.

Buck, C. (1989). *The ACTFL OPI: Teseter training manual.* Yonkers, NY: ACTFL.

Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language*. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.

Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Knapp, M. L., & Hall, J. A. (1997). *Non-verbal communication in human interaction* (4th ed.). Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publisher.

Lazaraton, A. (1996). Interlocutor support in oral proficiency interview: The case of case. *Language Testing, 13*, 151-172.

Liu, R., & Han, B. (1999). *Language testing and its methods.* Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Malandro, L. A., & Barker, L. (1989). *Non-verbal communication.* Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. Inc.

Morris, D. (1994). *Bodytalk*. London: Jonathan Cape.

O'Loughlin, K. (2001). *The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Plough, I., & Bogart, P. (2008). Perceptions of examiner behavior modulate power relations in oral performance testing. *Language Assessment Quarterly, 3*(5), 195-217.

Ross, R. S. (1974). *Speech communication: Fundamentals and practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Sabatelli, R., & Rubin, M. (1986). Nonverbal expressiveness and physical attractiveness as mediators of interpersonal perceptions. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 10*, 120-133.

Saigh, P. (1980). The effects of positive non-verbal examiner comments on the WISC-R performance of Americans in Lebanon. *The Journal of Psychology, 104*(2), 165-169.

Samovar, L., Porter, R., & Stefani, L. (1998). *Communication between cultures.* Marceline, Missouri: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Wen, Q. (1999). *Testing and teaching spoken English.* Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Wertsch, J. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wharton, T. (2009). *Pragmatics and non-verbal communication.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yammiyavar, P., Clemmensen, T., & Kumar, J. (2008). Influence of cultural background on non-verbal communication in a usability testing situation. *International Journal of Design, 2*(2), 31-40.